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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - PRESIDENT SHARIF DESCRIBES CURRENT FIGHTING, REQUESTS IMMEDIATE AID

¶1. (SBU) Summary: TFG President Sheikh Sharif told us May 14 that his government's al-Shabaab opponents are increasingly being supplemented by foreign fighters who are leading some of the attacks against TFG forces. Sharif ascribed initial TFG setbacks in the fighting to confusion among his Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) forces, who were initially not prepared to battle fighters with whom they had recently been allied. That problem has been corrected, Sharif said, and the TFG's current forces, led by a new commander, are prepared to fight, but needed salaries for some of the troops, certain types of ammunition, and weapons. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) In a late afternoon, May 14 telephone call, a subdued President Sheikh Sharif told us from offices at Villa Somalia, Mogadishu, that negotiations were still underway with one Hizbul Islam faction, presumably that part led by Yusuf Mohammed "Indha Adde." The other Hizbul Islam faction had followed ARS-Asmara's Hassan Dahir Aweys into an alliance with al-Shabaab, Sharif said. Sharif declined to predict the outcome of his negotiations with Indha Adde. Further complicating matters was the increasing presence of foreign fighters in Mogadishu. Some of them, Sharif said, were un-masked and leading attacks against TFG positions. Other of the opposition fighters were hardened fighters, Sharif said, and still others "criminals," who were formidable opponents.

¶3. (SBU) The TFG had been making good progress in its conversations with Indha Adde until Aweys's arrival in Mogadishu, Sharif said. Aweys's appearance, and the beginning of a concerted military campaign against TFG forces on May 9 had interrupted that process. Sharif confessed that his ARS-Djibouti forces were poorly prepared for the al-Shabaab-led offensive. Some of the forces had defected. Others, initially, were confused by the prospect of battling fighters with whom they previously been allied. Those problems had been resolved, Sherif said, and in his command were 2,000 troops that were backed by 800 policemen. Still to be deployed were an additional 1,500 troops, many of whom were in need of weapons. The leadership problems the troops initially encountered had been resolved with the May 14 appointment of a new and energetic armed forces commander, Yusuf Hussein Osman "Dhuumaal" (Darood/Mareehan) (Note: The Somali word "dhuumal" roughly translates to "discreet") Osman began his career as a military officer, then was moved to the police in 1988. He rose to Banadir Region Police Commissioner, then was promoted to Deputy Commissioner for National Police Operations. Sharif has named him Brigadier General and Chief of General Staff.

¶4. (SBU) Sharif voiced his profound gratitude for USG support, including the recent press release issued by the Department and a May 14 Embassy press release. Needed now, he said, was money so that his TFG could pay its troops, and purchase weapons and ammunition. Sharif agreed with us that AMISOM stood ready to supply small caliber ammunition. AMISOM did not have in its stocks, however, ammunition for heavier weapons, Sharif said. (Embassy has been told separately that

the TFG needs ammunition for RPG-7s, 12.7 mm rounds, 37mm AA rounds, 81/82 mm mortar rounds, 60 mm mortar rounds, 75 mm recoilless rounds, FAL G3s ammunition, and 145 mm AA rounds.) Some of this ammunition, Sharif thought, could be purchased in Mogadishu's markets if cash were available.

¶15. (SBU) Sharif voiced his government's determination to continue fighting. He believed that with the right resources, the TFG troops could hold their positions in Mogadishu and even reverse recent losses. He repeated the need for money for the troops and access to superior firepower.

Comment

¶16. (SBU) President Sharif seemed characteristically calm and confident that the TFG's initial setbacks could be reversed, provided his troops were properly supplied. He appealed urgently for financial support from the USG. At the end of the conversation, he asked that, with so many southern Somali extremist fighters converging on Mogadishu, thought be given to moving AMISOM troops into now-thinly al-Shabaab-occupied Baidoa and Kismaayo.

RANNEBERGER